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EVALUATING THE NEEDS OF NEWCOMER YOUTH IN ATLANTIC CANADIAN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMING SERVICE PROVISION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

ARAISA is a non-profit organization that provides support to the settlement and integration sector in Atlantic Canada. The goal of this report titled *"Evaluating the Needs of Newcomer Youth in Atlantic Canadian Employment Programming Service Provision"* is to obtain valuable information that can be used in assisting programming of employment service organizations in helping newcomer youth establish a new life in Atlantic Canada.

Newcomer youth are important players in the sustainability and future of Atlantic Canada's economy. These youth come to Atlantic Canada as economic immigrants, international students, and refugees. Currently, there are severe labour and skill shortages in Atlantic Canada largely due to an aging population and low fertility rates. The strong work ethic and skills that newcomer youth possess are valuable to employers in Atlantic Canada in filling their labour and employment gaps.

Numerous employment and training programs are offered to newcomer youth to help them enter the workforce in Atlantic Canada. However, many barriers and challenges exist in delivering these programs. We conducted 15 interviews with program staff and conducted 9 focus groups involving 70 newcomer youth between the ages of 15-30 across all four provinces of Atlantic Canada. These consultations aimed to determine the barriers and challenges regarding youth employment programs, methods of recruitment and awareness of programs, and the effectiveness of employment programming in easing newcomer youth into the Canadian workplace and labour market. Critiques and recommendations are made at the end of this report to address issues faced by newcomer youth services and to further improve employment programming.

Findings

According to program providers, design inputs for programming are centered around the needs of newcomer youth as well as the employer's stated needs. The main methods of youth recruitment for employment programming are word of mouth, social media advertisements, and outreach initiatives. Eligibility and accessibility to youth employment programs are generally related to funding requirements as well as the language proficiency of program applicants. Program providers stated numerous challenges youth face in accessing programming. Most notably, language barriers, lack of familial commitments, lack of social networks, lack of awareness of available programs, and transportation issues.

Focus groups with newcomer youth provided information on the obstacles they face in the Canadian labour market and workplaces. These include a lack of job opportunities in remote and rural locations, feeling racially stereotyped and discriminated in the workplace, concerns over employer perceptions, employers taking advantage of their employees, and employers failing to address workplace concerns of newcomer youth. The goals of newcomer youth in employment programming are generally to create social networks with employers and the community, to understand employers' needs, and to help youth learn new skills. Newcomer youth report that employment programming improves their confidence, improves their technological and team-based skills, provides a better perspective on their career paths, and extends their social networks.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the interviews and focus groups, this report draws a number of critiques on current newcomer youth employment programming: a lack of familial and social commitment support, concerns over the insufficient duration of programming, lack of online accessibility in programming, and a lack of consistency between employers and coordinators. Multi-faceted, concurrent programming with a holistic approach is the most easily accessible to newcomer youth and in-person, real-life world examples and instructors are the most helpful.

This report concludes with recommendations including engaging with the families of youth, prioritizing social development, extending program durations, and providing accessible online programming that can help newcomer youth who face challenges regarding transportation and time constraints due to job or school commitments.

OVERVIEW

ARISA undertook a one-year research project to identify the needs of newcomer youth aged 15-30 in Atlantic Canada. We conducted 9 focus groups with 70 youth and interviewed 15 staff from 13 different service providers in all four Atlantic provinces.

Compiled and summarized in this report, the research identifies if and how newcomer youth needs are being met with existing programming, with particular attention towards smaller and rural centres.

This research and associated recommendations are a culmination of:

1. **A review of pre-existing knowledge** on newcomer youth needs and barriers to employment
2. **An environmental scan** of programs specifically targeted to the demographic of newcomer youth in Atlantic Canada
3. **Interviews with federally-and-provincially-funded service providers** currently offering employment-related programming to newcomer youth
4. In-person and online **focus groups with eligible youth** in all four Atlantic provinces

OBJECTIVE

This project is intended to improve the program outcomes that newcomer youth acquire through accessible programs. These programs provide newcomer youth with the skills, learning experience, and opportunities they need to either find and maintain employment or/and return to or remain in school.

LITERATURE REVIEW: NEEDS OF NEWCOMER YOUTH

Socioeconomic

Adolescence is a critical development stage comprising notable social role transitions (Sawyer et al., [2018](#)). Coinciding with resettlement stress, these can impede well-being (Juang et al., [2018](#)).

Although physical and mental health of various newcomer populations tends to be superior to the native-born population upon arrival, a phenomenon known as the healthy immigrant effect, this advantage diminishes and health tends to deteriorate with time spent in Canada (Beiser et al., [2002](#); Vang et al., [2017](#); Xu & McDonald, [2010](#)).

Common post-migration stressors include but are not limited to loss of close relationships, loss of lifestyle, uncertainty about immigration status, change in socioeconomic status, change in cultural norms, and lack of proficiency in the host country's language (Pickren, [2014](#)). For adolescent newcomers in Canada, difficulty making friends and adjusting to the school setting are frequently reported stressors (Guo et al. [2019](#)).

Cultural

The hostility that newcomer youth face in the Canadian education system on the basis of their immigration status, race, language, culture, and other identity factors continues when they enter the job market (Ontario Federation of Labour, [2014](#)).

While some researchers note that immigrant youth are just as well adapted as their native peers (Sam et al., [2006](#)), others suggest that the social integration for racialized immigrants and their children is slower than for those of European origins (Reitz & Banerjee, [2007](#)).

If youths' social networks are limited due to prejudice and discrimination, their access to adequate work and employment is further reduced (Taylor & Krahn, 2013).

The labour market experiences of immigrant parents clearly impact their children's perceptions of education and work. Witnessing some of their parents' career dreams and aspirations not materialized as a result of moving to Canada is an inescapable context within which young newcomers are making career decisions (Domene & Young, 2019).

If family involvement is present, research suggests that immigrant families would benefit from having a large social network to allow greater and more trusted access to information and services (Tang, [2015](#)).

Accessibility

The most common and prohibitive barrier is language. Without overcoming the language barrier, newcomers are unable to fully participate in Canadian socio-cultural life (Statistics Canada, [2022](#)) and the labour market (WES, 2022).

First, language is a valuable technical skill (Wu et al., [2005](#)); second, language is a provider of social confidence (Hou et Beiser., [2006](#)). Language is ultimately an important “facilitator” of integration in both the social and economic domains (Strang & Ager, [2010](#)).

For those still learning in the new language acquisition process, it’s important to establish co-ethnic social networks (Massey & Espana, [1987](#)).

Newcomer students identify school as the primary context in which their social, emotional, and academic development and integration occurs (Gallucci & Kassan, [2019](#); Stermac et al., [2013](#); Suárez-Orozco & Marks, [2016](#)).

Still, newcomer youth pointed out accessibility barriers within the school system, including inappropriate grade placement, social isolation, and learning English as a second language (Anisef et al., [2010](#); Deckers & Zinga, [2012](#)).

Ideally, school counselors have knowledge of newcomer communities and actively promote school-family partnerships to increase their students' social support (Watkinson & Hersi, [2014](#)).

“

"The challenges aren't about accessing our programs but about getting help in school, with language support. One girl studied in our class and became a different person; she told the instructor that it was the first time she did a presentation in her life, even after she had already finished high school.."

”

-Nova Scotian Service Provider

LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMING DESIGN

Approaches to youth-development programs can be **resilience-focused** or **empowerment-focused**.

Resilience-Focused

- Resilience strategies usually concert efforts towards fostering confidence, social ability, and resilience among marginalized youth (Kadka et al., [2011](#))
- Such programs may promote productive and responsible citizenship, help youth avoid drugs, violence, and crime, and provide a safe and accessible learning environment to this specific demographic of newcomer youth

Empowerment-Focused

- Empowerment strategies focus on strengths in participants; these programs prioritize competencies, engagement, and self-development (Perkins et al., [2003](#))
- Once positive attributes are emphasized, support and encouragement tend to exponentially improve participant well-being, vision, and potential (Roffman et al., [2003](#))

The resilience-based and empowerment-based approaches translate into five kinds of youth settlement programs:

1. General/Educational Youth Program

General programs provide opportunities for immigrant youth to socialize with like-minded individuals and to understand and appreciate Canadian culture (Van Ngo, [2009](#)). Planning and learning with newcomer youth is viewed as a 'joint-project' with family members (Domene & Young, [2019](#)).

2. Settlement Workers in School Programs

Settlement workers in school (SWIS) programs feature SWIS workers who contact all newcomer families to ensure their familiarity with school and community resources and services. The importance is placed on facilitating interpersonal connections that evolve to mentorship opportunities (Amundson, [2018](#)).

3. Gender-Specific Programs

Gender-specific programs generally support positive self-development by providing environments of like-minded interpersonal relationships that develop through various activities like arts and crafts, sports and recreation, community outreach and exploration, and group discussion (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, [2007](#)).

4. School-Work Transition Programs

School-work transition programs target older youth and prioritize their successful integration into the labour market post-graduation. They foster employability skills through community activities, workshops, and seminars (Center for Newcomers, 2007).

5. Civic Participation/Leadership Programs

Leadership programs involve participants in character-building events through volunteer, social, or athletic activities. They generally hold the purpose of developing leadership skills like listening, interpersonal communication, decision-making, and social ability (Skills for Change, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW:**CRITIQUES OF EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMING**

Critics identify pervasive issues across all youth development program formats, including:

1. Generic Goals

Many programs prioritize newcomer youth acclimatization yet fail to clearly articulate the needs and issues on which they focus in the context of youth development (WES, 2023). The resulting program is less coherent than planned, evidence-based practice.

Usually, they overwhelmingly support early-stage acclimatization through recreational programs and activities, yet fail to consider multifaceted needs and issues facing newcomer youth like the formation of cultural identity, early childhood trauma, or social skill gaps.

2. Limited Scope of Learning

Very few programs identify and prioritize critical insights into the political, social, and cultural realities which newcomer youth face (Van Ngo, 2009). Few programs identify social justice, leadership, and advocacy, while even fewer actively confront real-world barriers like racism and discrimination with their participants (ESDC, 2016). However, programs are generally transitioning into learning and working with diverse cultures and communities (e.g., Black community, Arabic community, LGBTQ+ community).

3. Funding Limitations and Short-term Mentality

A typical 12-week program doesn't provide the longevity necessary to cultivate lasting change even in a small participant cohort (CDCD, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW: BEST PRACTICES IN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMING

According to Bob Marr, a training expert at California's Employment Development Department, the following seven principles are recommended to pursue the greatest possible effectiveness in job training programs (Bernick, 2005):

1. There is **no one correct form** of training.
2. Effective training programs **keep close tabs on local labour market** conditions.
3. Effective training curriculums are developed in **close contact with employers**.
4. Effective training programs **don't try to train everyone**.
5. Effective programs use a **case management approach** that is not heavy with staff but that tracks participants during training and afterwards for a two-year period.
6. Effective programs **identify job openings** before training.
7. Effective training programs foster a **strong sense of mission** among training staff.

ATLANTIC CANADA ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Our environmental scan reveals the extent of employment programs and services available to newcomer youth in the Atlantic region with a focus on employment-related programming.

Existing programming operates alongside larger cross-provincial initiatives, including:

- *ACOA: Atlantic Growth Strategy,*
- *Economic Development Initiative, and*
- *ARAIISA: Coordination of Various Professional Development Trainings for Settlement Service Providers*

and within public sector initiatives, including:

- *the Atlantic Immigration Program and Atlantic Growth Strategy,*
- *Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS),*
- *Youth Guided Employment Opportunities (YGEO),*
- *Skills Launch Youth Program, and the*
- *Government Assisted Refugees and Resettlement Assistance Program*

The majority of youth employment programs are funded by federal or provincial governments that provide similar services like skills training, networking, and paid internship opportunities.



NEW BRUNSWICK

New Brunswick hosts employment services through settlement and non-settlement agencies, including a focus on the Francophone population that is unique from the other Atlantic provinces.

Service Providing Organizations

Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB)

- Skills development and employability for ages 18+ and finished high school

Centre de Ressources pour nouveaux arrivants au Nord-Ouest (CRNA-NO)

- Employability strengthening services for immigrants based on status in Canada

Saint John Newcomer Center (SJNC)

- Provides essential employability skills training

Société Nationale de l'Acadie (SNA)

- Virtual training sessions to strengthen ability to work remotely and to use social media

Multicultural Association Chaleur Region (MACR)

- Settlement, resettlement assistance and employment services

Multicultural Association of Fredericton (MCAF)

- Skills Launch Program for immigrant youth between ages 18 and 30 to explore career options and gain local work experience (funded by the Government of Canada)
- 26-week paid work placement

Multicultural Association of the Greater Moncton Area (MAGMA)

- Skills Launch Program in partnership with MCAF, NBMC, and YMCA of Greater Saint John Newcomer Connections
- Workplace essential skills training and internships for ages 18-30

New Brunswick Multicultural Council (NBMC)

- Skills Launch Program in partnership with MCAF, MAGMA, and YMCA of Greater Saint John Newcomer Connections
- Employment services for newcomers

YMCA of Greater Saint John Newcomer Connections

- Settlement and resettlement assistance services
- Employment and language training programs



NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

In Newfoundland and Labrador, as in the other provinces, eligibility is program/funder specific with a diverse eligibility requirement based on immigration and resident status. Some organizations are gender-focused while others provide services to everyone. The services and activities generally offered include career planning and employability development.

Service Providing Organizations

Waypoints

- Youth are Working Program and Test Drive Program for ages 18-30
- Employment and training opportunities for vulnerable youth

Murphy Center

- Youth Works Well Navigator Program (YWWNP) for ages 18-30 transitioning into the labour force
- Two Roads career development service for ages 16 and above

Sharing Our Cultures

- Employment Access for Resettled Newcomers Program (EARN)
- Skill training and business planning for children and youth of Newfoundland and Labrador

YMCA of Newfoundland and Labrador - Employment, Enterprise, and Newcomer Services

- Youth Guided Employment Opportunities Program (YGEO) for ages 15-30
- Newcomer Youth Programming (NYP) for ages 13-18

Association for New Canadians (ANC)

- Youth Pathway Program to provide skill development, experiential and volunteer activities and career advice for ages 15-30
- Acquiring Experience; Integrating Skills (AXIS Program) for immigrants living in NL

Multicultural Women's Organization of NL (MWONL)

- Provides employment assessment and awareness services for newcomer women
- Focuses on education and networking



NOVA SCOTIA

All age groups in Nova Scotia are covered by employment programs, as long as they are residents of the province. Predominantly offered services and activities include career planning and support for training participants in the area of employability.

Service Providing Organizations

MetroWorks

- Edge Program - Job search and readiness program for youth and young adults
- Racialized Newcomer Women Employability Program - Skills development and work experience for newcomer women

Inclusion Nova Scotia

- Barrier-free network to increase employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities
- Moving Forward Together strategy for sustainable employment for persons with disabilities

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)

- Provides the Immigrant Youth Employability Project, including skill training and a work-term
- Offers programs to ages 15-30

Cape Breton Partnership

- Immigration services and business planning
- Support employers in attracting and retaining talent through immigration efforts

Cape Breton Island Centre for Immigration

- Atlantic Immigration Program (AIP)
- Employment support (resume writing, job search, interview preparation, business development)

YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth Centre for Immigrant Programs

- Employment and education service for ages 16+
- Employment assistance (job search, resume and cover letter support, job interview practice)

Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse

- Business and entrepreneurship services
- Employment services (job search, skills development, career planning)



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

In PEI, there are a small number of settlement and non-settlement employment services available that offer services to newcomers and residents of PEI. Services and activities that are predominantly offered include career planning and support for training to all ages.

Service Providing Organizations

Skills PEI

- Offers workplace skills training
- Career planning, education, and networking opportunities

Connection 2 Employment

- CAST Program, C2E Program, SEAM Program
- Skills training, resource connections and encouragement support for PEI youth aged 16 and above

Holland College

- Offers free language courses for protected persons funded by the Canadian government
- Full-time or part-time
- General classes or specialized hospitality/health care classes
- Private classrooms for mother and baby classes

IRSA PEI

- All-age programs for newcomers to PEI
- Immigrant and refugee services, including career planning, training, and networking

Coopérative d'intégration francophone

- Settlement services for French-speaking newcomers
- Services for employers to support recruitment policies

PEI Community Navigators

- Assist new residents with transitioning into the local community
- Provide resources and contacts for settlement needs
- Work with employers to assist the integration of newcomer employees

INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM PROVIDERS

METHODOLOGY

Structured interviews with service providers inform current strengths, weaknesses, and directions moving forward.

Service provider input is divided into seven categories:

Program Design Inputs

Challenges in Service Delivery

Eligibility and Access to Programs

Youth Challenges in Accessing Services

Participant Recruitment

Program Evaluation Methods

Good Practices

SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS: PROGRAM DESIGN INPUTS

1. DEPENDS ON PARTICIPANT'S STATED NEEDS

“

"If there's a topic that they want to learn, then we incorporate that into our program... we'll try to have those conversations so we can craft our program for them."

”

- Most service providers design their programs according to the stated needs of their cohorts
- Needs assessment is mostly a conversational process
- This program formulation method is especially popular in smaller and more rural-based organizations, where cohorts are smaller

2. DEPENDS ON PARTICIPANT NEEDS FROM INFORMAL INTAKE PROCESS

- Multiple service providers described a formal, documented intake process
- Case managers complete formal intake assessments to determine participant needs
- This format generally includes an interview and a written assessment
- More popular with larger service providers

3. DEPENDS ON AGENCY CAPACITY

- Employment program providers can have separate cohorts based on Anglophone and Francophone designations and the needs specific to their community
- Cohorts based on age ranges (i.e. 18-30) to address specific needs associated with young adults
- Staff can share information and good practices with one another

4. DEPENDS ON THE EMPLOYER'S NEEDS

“

"We're always looking for opportunities to meet employers' needs as well. We rely on employers to share that information with us."

”

- Service providers identified the needs of employers and the labour market as an essential part to employment program design input
- An even consideration between the employers' needs and an employment program participant's fit to the employer
- As a part of their funding, multiple service providers provide wage subsidies to fund work placements as a means to maintain strong employer relations
- Wage subsidies encourage employers to keep returning to the service providers and find willing participants for their workplace
- Employment program participants can be hired by employers upon completion of the programming and receive additional on the job training to work full-time
- A healthcare work placement participant can work as a patient attendant while receiving training to work as a full time registered nurse



SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS: ELIGIBILITY AND ACCESS TO PROGRAMS

1. DEPENDS ON THE FUNDING SOURCE

“

"The biggest thing is access to program funding, because it's not available to many of them right now. Our provincial partners are trying to get this funding, but our hands are tied."

”

- Most service providers accept and deny participants according to funder requirements
- Funders often specify age ranges
- Funders specify eligibility based on immigration status

2. DEPENDS ON LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

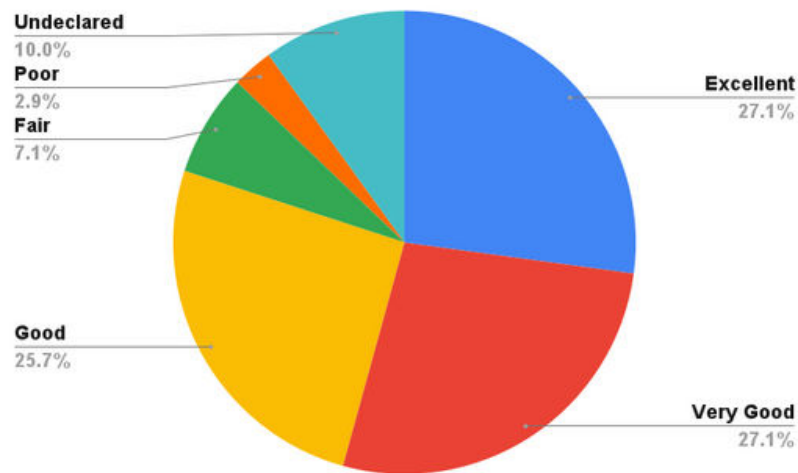
“

"We have a guide intake questionnaire to measure their CLB level in terms of their speaking, writing, reading and comprehension skills. For those who do not pass, we refer them to other organizations."

”

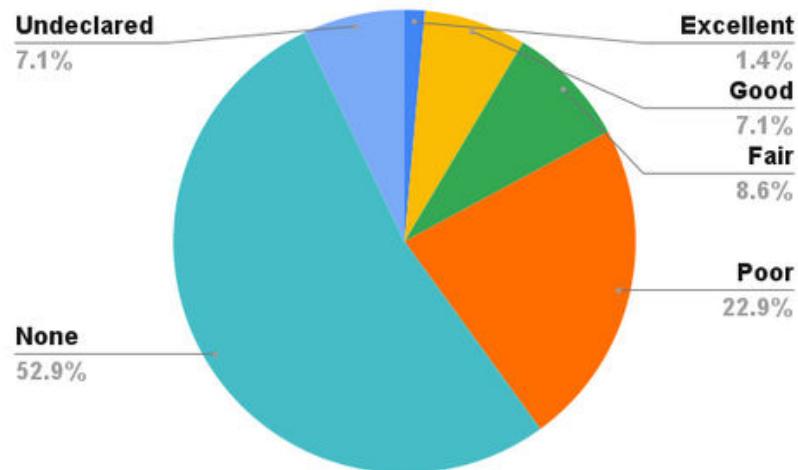
- Language proficiency is graded against the Canadian Language Benchmarks
- Some service providers identified Level 3 as the minimum requirement, others identified Level 4
- Some service providers are open to all language proficiencies, relying on an interpreter database instead

PARTICIPANT LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH



Based on survey results of 70 employment programming participants 19 reported excellent language proficiency in English (27.1%), 19 reported very good proficiency (27.1%), 18 reported good proficiency (25.7%), 5 reported fair proficiency (7.1%), 2 reported poor proficiency (2.9%), 0 reported no proficiency and 7 were undeclared (10.0%).

PARTICIPANT LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN FRENCH



Based on the same survey results, only 1 participant reported excellent language in French (1.4%), 0 reported very good proficiency, 5 reported good proficiency (7.1%), 6 reported fair proficiency (8.6%), 16 reported poor proficiency (22.9%), 37 reported no proficiency (52.9%) and 5 were undeclared (7.1%).

SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT METHODS

1. WORD-OF-MOUTH IS THE MOST POPULAR

- Almost all service providers emphasized word-of-mouth as an outstanding recruitment method
- Service providers find that those attracted through word-of-mouth have more trust and commitment to the programming as they already developed some understanding of the service provisions and personal interest in taking them

2. OUTREACH TO SCHOOLS

“

"Settlement workers in schools know who to talk to and know the newcomer population so they spread the word."

”

- Many service providers conduct school outreach through permanently placed settlement workers, school counselors, or directly to the student body
- Some service providers offer school registration services such as providing school-ready children with the registration intake while simultaneously sharing information about the available programming
- High school outreach commonly involves presentations with EAL classes followed by introductory information sessions
- Outreach from universities to provide students with employment opportunities and referrals to programs

3. AMBASSADORSHIP PROGRAMS

- Ambassadorship programs propel word-of-mouth marketing and community awareness
- Some organizations use ambassadorship (alumni) programs to enhance the diversity and trust of participants

4. OUTREACH TO ETHNOCULTURAL GROUPS

“

"I reach out to ethno-cultural groups. [As I am part of an ethno-cultural group] I introduce myself and do info sessions as needed. Because the programs have been here since 2017, the Syrian community knows our program through word of mouth and referrals."

”

- Some service providers conduct outreach to local ethnocultural groups
- Providers emphasize the need for newcomers to expand their networks outside of their own ethnocultural groups
- Broaden the scope of social networks and employment search in preparation for working with people from all over the world



SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS: CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

1. LANGUAGE BARRIERS

“

"In everyday classes, participants are often overwhelmed with the material and the language on top. Even if we go for a learner-centered approach, a teacher-participant ratio of 1:12 is difficult to overcome."

”

- Providers cite discouraged participants that feel isolated from school, college, or success because of language barriers
- Instructor resources and time are often insufficient to cater to language needs
- Language proficiency services are federally funded, and thus unavailable through some programs
- Aside from structural implications, language concerns can impede participant confidence and willingness to continue

2. LACK OF PARENTAL AND FAMILIAL SUPPORT

- Parental and familial cultural differences sometimes put stress on the youth-program relationship
- Service providers describe parental coaching as just as important as participant coaching
- Youth sometimes rely heavily on coordinators for life-wide support in areas outside of the program such as filing taxes or applying for citizenship
- Coordinators try to check up on youth, but these challenges can strain coordinator time and cause burnout

3. BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES AND ABSENTEEISM

“

"I spend 80-90% of my time every day addressing behavioural concerns."

”

- Youth participant behaviour can absorb the majority of coordinator time
- Coordinators note that behavioural issues are sometimes related to complex mental health needs that cannot be separately accommodated due to funding limitations
- Mental health and learning disabilities are often undiagnosed, complex, and sometimes not addressed by parents who may be weary of attracting cultural stigmas attached to these challenges

4. LACK OF TRUST AND BUY-IN

- Youth participants have difficulty trusting newly introduced programs
- Providers find that participants may understand the program but fail to see how the program benefits them
- Some providers have difficulty explaining that even if the program does not result in employment, the skills learned (resume writing, language ability) and community networking is beneficial for the newcomer youth's future in Atlantic Canada
- Programs without formal accreditations are less attractive and have more difficulty retaining participants

5. INCOMPATIBILITY BETWEEN BACKGROUND AND THE LABOUR MARKET

- Some participants bring work experience that isn't compatible with the local labour market and popular job openings
- Providers have difficulty aligning participant expectations about the Canadian labour market, available job opportunities, and the link that their program provides
- Some participants leave the labour market because it doesn't match their skillset

6. LENGTH OF PROGRAM CYCLE

“

"For everyone involved in the organization, it's like you have this good thing and then it ends. It would be nice if it was longer than one year or a part of core funding."

”

- Coordinators experience pressure based on program length
- Some service providers report that a one year funding term only provides enough time to introduce their service to newcomers
- Due to insufficient program durations, providers report previous program participants returning to the same program in the future
- The time away between service providers and newcomers feels like they are 'starting from scratch' again

7. EXPECTATION SETTING WITH EMPLOYERS

- Some employers don't understand the discrepancy between adult employees and youth employees
- Many newcomer youth employees need some kind of mentorship from the employer
- Employers can grow to perceive their employees as burdensome if they don't match their pre-conceived notions

8. INSUFFICIENT FUNDING

- Funding often inhibits participation based on criteria requirements
- Providers struggle to balance between maximizing the breadth of support and budget concerns
- Many providers cite translators and language services as desirable but inaccessible services due to funding limitations

SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS: YOUTH CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

1. FAMILIAL AND SCHOOL COMMITMENTS

- Some participants are pre-committed to family obligations like child/sibling care
- Service providers have difficulty tending to different age groups simultaneously
- Familial obligations can interrupt programming access and limit possible work term placements
- School challenges already require youth newcomer attention, creating difficulty attending programs while committed to school

2. LACK OF AWARENESS

“

"A lot of programs are not good at marketing. When I talk with teenagers and high schools and university students, they don't know about the organizations around."

”

- Youth are often unaware of the breadth of services available to them
- Newcomers do not hear of employment program services upon their arrival in Atlantic Canada

3. TRANSPORTATION

- High transit time encumbers program participation
- Many newcomer youth do not have access to a vehicle or lack a certified driver's license
- Newcomer youth in rural communities have limited access to programs as most are offered in urban locations

4. LACK OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

“

"Youth have no support here. They don't have the support network of who to ask and where to go. It is crucial that they maximize their network. Once they get that connection, they always keep coming back."

”

- Participants have difficulty opening up if they don't identify with who they're talking with
- Participants can feel socially excluded and unable to connect with others in the program



SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS: EVALUATION METHODS

1. INFORMAL EVALUATIONS

- Informal evaluations are the most common form of program evaluation
- Informal methods are popular with smaller and rural service providers
- Some providers assign the lack of formal evaluation to the lack of formal programming
- Providers feel participants will find formal evaluations too professional and will choose not to complete the survey
- Providers feel an informal discussion with the participant may yield more information

2. SOME ORGANIZATIONS REFER TO THIRD-PARTIES FOR EVALUATION

- One high-resource organization partnered with a local university to conduct full program evaluations with current participants and graduates
- Another organization formed a partnership that facilitates pre and post-evaluation surveys

3. FUNDING SOURCES DETERMINE THE EXTENT OF FORMAL EVALUATION

“

"We generally find that the funders don't really prioritize it, so we don't look into it. Is that data important? Yes. It just hasn't been prioritized."

”

- Organizations under high-involvement funding arrangements are more likely to formalize evaluation methods
- The scope of evaluation is usually dependent on the funder's focus and priorities
- One provider uses work site evaluation visits for employer and participant interviews that is provided as part of their funding

SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS: GOOD PRACTICES

1. MULTIFACETED, CONCURRENT PROGRAMMING

- Concurrent programming that caters to varying age ranges improves convenience and accessibility
- This is a 'holistic' approach to service delivery that eliminates absenteeism due to childcare and family obligations

2. INTERPRETERS AND RELATED LANGUAGE SERVICES TO INCREASE CONFIDENCE

- Organizations with coordinators who speak the same language as the participants help attract more clients
- Parents are more trusting of services with interpretation available

3. A 'HOLISTIC' APPROACH

"We want to fill gaps that exist. There's no formula for our program, it's what's needed."

- Includes coordination with families, not just youth
- Individual communication with youth's parents allows for better employment program planning to avoid familial conflicts
- A program with a holistic approach will operate under multiple coordinators, not just one
- Prioritizes internal (cohort) membership and public (community) membership

4. PRIORITIZE OUT-OF-CLASS ACTIVITIES

- Helps strengthen internal (cohort) social networks
- Provide opportunities to interact with others in English
- Allow participants to reach outside of their ethnographic norm

5. 'SELL' TO THE PARENTS

“

"The parents' experiences matter: if they don't see the importance in higher education, then it's more difficult to enroll the kids in our activities."

”

- Better coordination with parents improves attendance, behaviour, and trust in programming

6. CONSISTENCY AND EXPERIENCE OF INSTRUCTORS

- Consistency of instructors is important to maintain the integrity of the program from the participant's perspective
- Service providers note that youth will take advantage of inexperienced instructors

7. STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

“

"Strong relationships with community partners increases [sic] your knowledge of what's out there and public knowledge of your program."

”

- Community partners can provide newcomers with referrals and information about programs to meet their needs

8. HAVE CHAMPION EMPLOYERS

- Champion employers are understanding of the service providers' goals and the nature of youth work placements and youth needs
- Subsidies attract employers, but strong relationships between employers and communities bolster perceptions of employers
- Strong and consistent relationships with employers help mitigate workplace challenges

9. PROVIDE INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY TRAINING TO EMPLOYERS AND THE WIDER PUBLIC

- Community Inclusion Training delivers information on immigration, bias, and racism
- The training sets proper expectations with employers about the needs of newcomer youth



SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS: SUCCESS STORIES

Numerous service providers shared particular success stories for newcomer youth participants in their employment programs.

“

"One young man in Moncton had a real interest in fashion design. He started in 2019 and reached a work placement in 2020... Today he owns his own small shop in Moncton. He's so popular that none of us can get him to do stuff for us."

”

“

"For our last intake we had a young man who's got a physical disability, and he was just down about life... It took a mountain of work to get him through, but he's one of our strongest participants now."

”

“

"My favorite story is about a 30-year old individual from Ukraine with her son. She came into my office after 4-5 days and said 'I need help, I don't know where to go'. She got a position at the YMCA [in a fitness leadership role]."

”

“

"There is a student that we had from last year. He was new to Canada. [Everyone is] speaking a different language and he was trying to make friends and connect with people and understand the culture... [I helped] them with getting out of their comfort zone and they started to make connections with other people."

”

FOCUS GROUPS WITH YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

METHODOLOGY

Focus groups with youth participants offer the second perspective on current employability programming

Newcomer Youth input is divided into nine categories:

Hopes and Dreams

**Obstacles to Labour
Market Entry**

**Challenges in the Canadian
Workplace**

**Challenges in Accessing
Programming**

Reasons for Joining

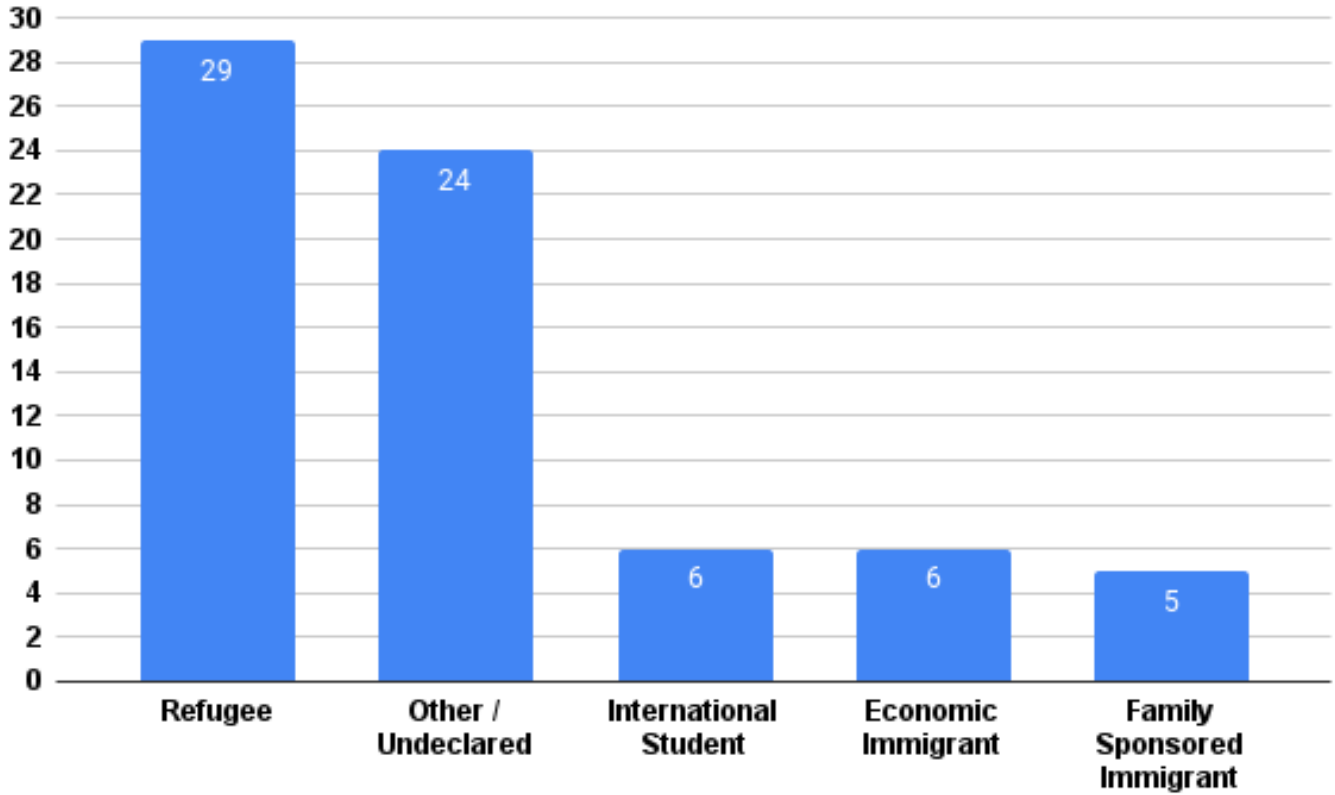
Recruitment

Program Goals

Program Results

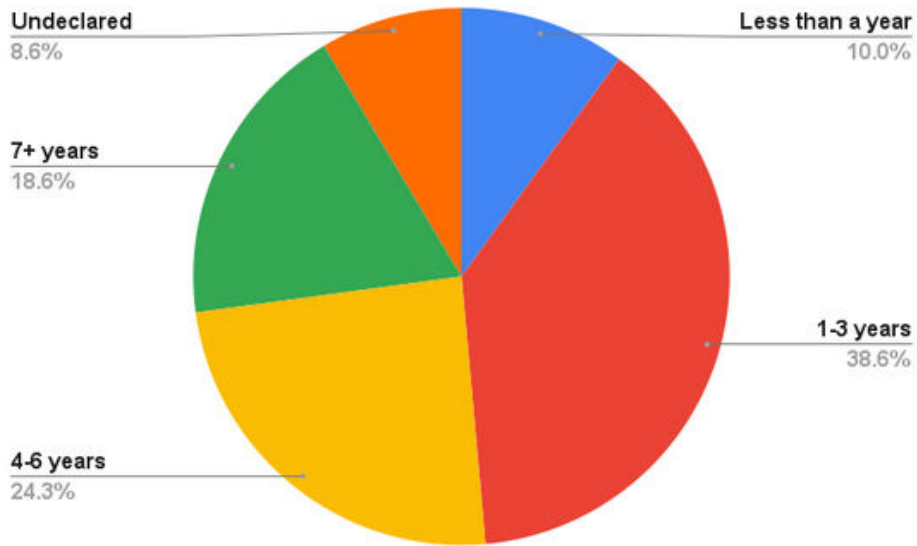
**Current Gaps in
Programming**

IMMIGRATION CATEGORIES



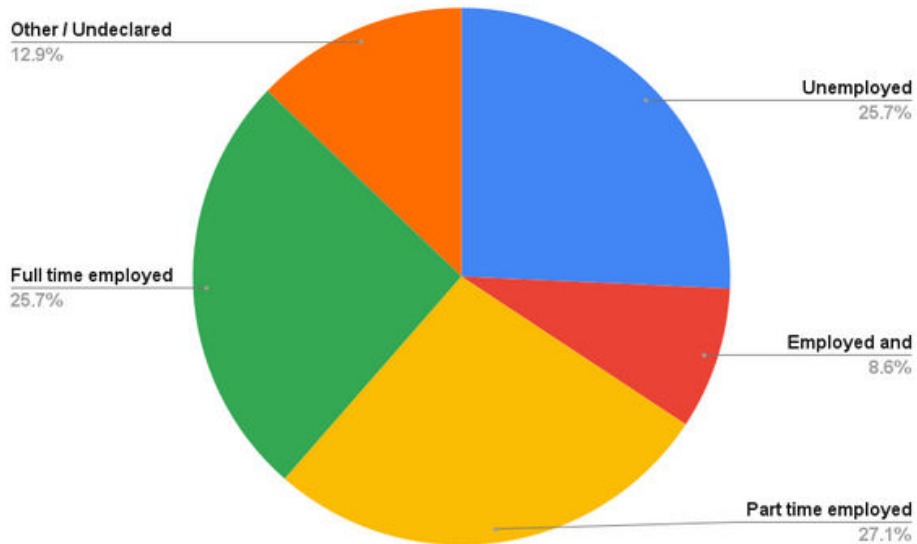
Based on the participant survey background information 6 participants reported being an economic immigrant, 5 reported being a family sponsored immigrant, 6 reported being an international student, 29 reported being a refugee and 24 reported being classified as other or undeclared

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY



Based on the participant survey back ground information 7 participants reported having less than a year of work experience (10.0%), 27 reported having 1-3 years of work experience (38.6%), 17 reported having 4-6 years of work experience (24.3%), 13 reported having 7+ years of experience (18.6%) and 6 were undeclared (8.6%)

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS



For participant's current employment status 18 reported unemployed (25.7%), 6 reported employed while searching for another job (8.6%), 19 reported part time employment (27.1%), 18 reported full time employment (25.7%) and 9 reported other or undeclared (12.9%).

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS: HOPES AND DREAMS

1. A BRIGHTER FUTURE

“

“In Canada we have a chance to become what we want, it’s a great opportunity to be here.”

”

- Youth report wanting to pursue further education
- Many of the youth report simply wanting safety and stability in their lives

“

“There is an ocean of opportunity to do what you want [in Canada].”

”

- Other youth report wanting to pursue a career that values their experience in their desired profession
- Many youth also spoke about how they wanted to give back to the community and help others

“

“We have more chances and opportunities here in Canada to achieve our dreams.”

”

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS: OBSTACLES TO LABOUR MARKET ENTRY

Due to school commitments, time-consuming job searches, and less work experience, youth experience lower employment rates than other age groups (Morissette, 2021). This situation has been exacerbated by COVID (Deng et al., 2022)

1. LACK OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES

“

"We have to apply so quickly. Sometimes you don't have time before other people get it."

”

- Youth describe current job openings as scarce creating a lot of competition for jobs especially in rural communities

2. EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS

- Some youth reported that employers believe that students won't be as available as other employees
- Youth expressed that employers believe that students won't work as hard as other employees
- Youth also reported that some employers have unreasonable expectations of English competence amongst newcomer youth

3. JOB REQUIREMENTS

“

"Some of the job requirements are difficult to meet, like Canadian work experience."

”

- Having Canadian work experience, along with being able to provide Canadian references
- A valid driver's license or means of transportation
- Work hours conflicting with school deter newcomer youth from working

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS: OBSTACLES IN THE CANADIAN WORKPLACE

1. DIFFERENT TREATMENT BASED ON RACE

“

"I feel racialized. I felt racialized despite doing everything required. It seems like I was doing too much and they weren't comfortable. "You weren't supposed to do that". They say you are going overboard."

”

- Perception of immigrants working too hard, resulting in discrimination
- Language used by co-workers in the workplace can make newcomers feel uncomfortable (i.e., jokes about race, insensitive questions about home country, etc.)

2. FEAR OF SPEAKING UP

“

"There's fear to speak up because there aren't many options; we need the job."

”

- Immigrants are often unaware of their right to question workplace practices and the Canadian workplace culture
- Newcomers fear for their status to live in Canada if they were to lose their job
- Employers may make newcomers feel like they are replaceable and others can easily take their place

3. EMPLOYERS TAKING ADVANTAGE

Participants reported cases where employers took advantage of employees based on their status as newcomers:

- Employers asking new employees to "try the job" on their first day without pay
- Deducting wages for forgetting to sign in
- Lay-offs due to injury within the first weeks of starting the job

4. EMPLOYERS FAILING TO ADDRESS WORKPLACE ISSUES

“

"I made it known to the head of the team that 'Okay, this is the issue I'm facing and I'm not comfortable with it'. She addressed it, but it didn't stop. So I felt 'no, I can't try this business environment. It's becoming toxic for me.' It's not good for my emotional state. So I had to move on to a different work environment."

”

- Employers failing to deal with challenges newcomer youth face in the workplace will cause them to leave the job
- Employers may have a lack of awareness on how to deal with differences in culture in the workplace
- Lack of diversity training in the workplace for both employers and local employees

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS: FINDING EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS

1. FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Youth most commonly hear of programs from friends and family
- For youth under 18, parents often hear of the program and sign their children up

2. FACEBOOK AND SOCIAL MEDIA

“

"In my case it was on Facebook and talking with friends. We have a Latin community here in St. John's and they are always posting all the things that are good for us. They post every single program that any organization has."

”

- Some youth reported not being aware of programs available to them until they heard about them on social media
- Program coordinators advertise on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other forms of social media
- Youth are active on social media. Allows for extended outreach and easy connections

3. OUTREACH FROM OTHER EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

“

"I participated in another program, which connected me with this one. I just met people who advised me to participate in this."

”

- Program providers operating as a network helps address the specific needs of individual newcomer youth

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS: REASONS NEWCOMER YOUTH JOIN AN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

1. TO UNDERSTAND WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT AND NEED

- Youth report networking helps show employers the skills they have and match them with what the employer is looking for
- Newcomer youth learn that their skills and work ethic are valuable to employers

2. TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO START A BUSINESS

- Many newcomer youth desire to start their own business in Atlantic Canada
- Some newcomer youth have previous entrepreneurial experience from their country of origin
- Newcomer youth want to understand the differences in starting a business in Canada compared to their country of origin (i.e., regulations, networking, more government support, etc.)

3. TO MEET NEW PEOPLE IN A NEW PLACE

“

"I attended a networking event to meet various employers. This was helpful because I got to connect with them and learn what they are looking for and what the expectations are."

”

- Newcomers feel social networking is different and more important in the Canadian culture compared to their country of origin
- Programs help newcomers get their foot in the door in meeting employers and connecting to the community

4. TO LEARN NEW SKILLS

“

"They teach us to learn skills or experience Canadian workplace culture. They have many years of experience with working with Canadians."

”

- Youth expressed a desire to learn English and improve their language skills as an important reason for joining employment programming
- Several groups stressed the importance of learning teamwork and how that was important in the Canadian workplace compared to their workplace back home
- Many youth newcomers report being unfamiliar with the Canadian standard for resumes
- Employment programming workshops provide newcomers with appropriate skills to write a Canadian resume
- Youth reported additional valuable skills learned include: interview preparation, career exploration, social and employer networking, and first-hand workplace experience are amongst the most valued in achieving their career goals

5. TO FIND A SATISFACTORY JOB

“

"Sometimes, you are forced to work that job because you need the experience, you need the money, so you're just stuck with that job and cannot leave it because you're not going to find another job."

”

- Newcomer youth experience difficulty finding a job
- Programs offer newcomer youth a chance to refine their skills, and credentials and overcome language barriers preventing them from gaining employment
- Some newcomer youth have already found employment but are dissatisfied due to low earnings, low job satisfaction, workplace challenges, or a mismatch between the job and the newcomer's skills
- Programs can offer career exploration to find jobs that match newcomers' abilities and their preferred work sector

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS: CHALLENGES ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMING

1. TRANSPORTATION

- Transportation especially in rural and small communities is an issue for many newcomer youth as the programs offered may be in another town or city
- Many newcomers upon arrival do not have their own vehicle or means of transportation
- Lack of public transport (i.e., buses showing up late or not arriving)

2. FUNDER ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Youth expressed that eligibility requirements in some programs based on age or immigration status prevent some youth from accessing programs

3. SCHOOL COMMITMENTS

- Some youth expressed school work and other school-related activities that prevented them from attending an employment program

4. FINDING THE PROGRAM

- Newcomers often lack social and community networks upon arrival making it difficult to hear about programs
- Newcomers may not have or be familiar with the social media the programs are advertised on

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS: GOALS IN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMING

1. NETWORKING WITH EMPLOYERS

- Newcomers want to explore the types of work available to them and the career path they want to take
- Some newcomers report networking with employers and the community is more important than the skills obtained

2. NETWORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

“

"When I joined what I had in mind was of course, networking just like everybody else, but then for me, it was also more of knowing about my community, my surroundings, the culture I'm going to stay in because it's a really different culture."

”

- Newcomers want to learn to work and understand people from different cultures
- Anti-racism is important, newcomers want to be in a safe and welcoming learning environment

3. FINDING A JOB THAT MATCHES THEIR SKILL SET

- Newcomers with work experience and skills learned in their home country may be stuck working a job that doesn't match their skills
- Goals to find employment that matches their skill set

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS: REAL IMPACTS OF EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMING

1. IMPROVEMENTS IN CONFIDENCE AND TEAM-BASED SKILLS

“

"I have confidence with this and in my own life. It gives me a lot of confidence. It's a good program for us. This is really good for the people to start. Confidence and learning new things."

”

- Newcomers gain confidence through team work and problem solving
- Ability to work as a team provides more confidence in the workplace environment

2. BETTER PERSPECTIVE ON POTENTIAL CAREER PATHS

- Newcomers find career exploration workshops useful for achieving their goals
- Many youths in school aren't thinking about their careers yet
- Career exploration helps them get ahead in thinking about their potential careers

3. IMPROVED SOCIAL NETWORKS

- Many newcomers have limited or no social networks upon arrival
- Newcomers realize social networking is important in the Canadian workplace and culture
- Programs allow newcomers the chance to meet different employers from various industries that match their skills or make friends for job referrals

4. IMPROVED TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCE

- Programs offer math and computer classes
- Newcomers report increased skills in computer programs such as Word, Powerpoint and Excel

5. IMPROVED INTERVIEW SKILLS

“

"They help us with what exactly to say in the interview. They give me a piece of paper and say 'those are the questions you will be asked at the interview' and how you should respond."

”

- Youth newcomers may not have interview experience from their country of origin
- Interviews in the Canadian workplace culture can differ from interviews in their country of origin
- Newcomers report some of the questions in Canadian interviews are "tricky" to deal with
- Programs offer interview training for future preparation with employer interviews

6. IMPROVED WORKPLACE CONFIDENCE

- Newcomer youth learn how to deal with racism in the workplace
- Become familiarized with employee rights in the workplace
- Learn and improve their language and communication skills
- Gain familiarity with the Canadian workplace culture

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS: CURRENT GAPS AND IMPROVEMENTS

1. PUBLIC CULTURAL EXPOSURE / DIVERSITY TRAINING

“

"Of course exposure is very important. The more you interact with different people with different minds. It's important to you and it helps you... but then I find that people here are not just so exposed to the different cultures."

”

- Cross cultural and diversity training should start early in schools to familiarize younger generations with working with people of different cultures
- Critical mass - The larger the immigrant population the more involved the public will be in engaging with people of different cultures

2. EMPLOYER CULTURAL EXPOSURE / DIVERSITY TRAINING

“

"The organizations need to do more work with employers especially cross cultural work. I asked for a day off because I was fasting and the employer didn't want to give it to me. Bad experiences with supervisors, taken advantage because of our fear of being fired."

”

- Extend cross cultural training to employers and other organizations
- Diversity training enables employers to have a better understanding of newcomers' needs and make appropriate adjustments in the the workplace

3. MORE PROGRAMS FOR SOCIAL NETWORKS AND CONNECTIONS

- Newcomers want to learn about the workplace and their employers before they start working
- Many newcomers (especially in remote areas) find it difficult to make friends and integrate into the community
- Provide a comprehensive online job portal specifically tailored for newcomers unfamiliar with the online job searching process in order to easily find jobs in their local area

4. GENERAL PROGRAMMING IMPROVEMENTS

- Provide newcomers with a better understanding of their job before they start it
- Differentiate programs based on high-skill vs low-skill (i.e., high vs low language ability, completed high school vs post-secondary education, etc.)
- Programs in general should last longer and have more follow ups with participants
- More collaboration with education facilities and greater exploration of education-related opportunities
- Additional transportation assistance and arrangements
- Help newcomer youth and international students find part time jobs and/or better jobs that match their skills



CONCLUSIONS: INSIGHTS INTO IMPROVING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVISION

Youth who are seeking fulltime permanent employment may decide to leave for more desirable areas if they cannot find reliable employment in their current location, or if they are disrespected or discriminated against in the workplace. The following critiques and recommendations are made to employment programming to increase immigrant retention in Atlantic Canada



REVIEW:
CRITIQUES OF EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMING

Critics identify pervasive issues across all youth development program formats, including:

1. Program buy-in is familial, not individual

Childcare and related family obligations are common deterrents from participation. In the case that parental influences don't value the importance of programming, the distraction is even stronger.

2. Employability is as social as it is technical

Many youth refer to workplace challenges and job search barriers that stem from a lack of social confidence. Interpersonal communication, confidence, and technical capability are positively correlated.

3. Programs should extend beyond 12 weeks

Service providers and youth participants highlighted the benefits of extending timelines for employability programs.

4. Diversity in background and language amongst service providers improves participant confidence

Coordinators with similar backgrounds as participants are described as being more trustworthy, especially by parents. Similarly, interpretation services make the learning environment more welcoming and productive for youth participants.

5. The most accessible programming is multifaceted, concurrent programming

Youth more consistently attend and engage in programming that runs concurrently with family-friendly programming. Concurrent programming reduces the impacts of transportation issues and family obligations and improves buy-in.

6. Proper expectation setting with employers for long-lasting relationships

Employability programs which offer wage subsidies to employers should invest in long-term relationship development with the hopes of sustaining "champion employer" relationships.

"Champion employers" are understanding of the differences between youth and adult workers, the cultural differences of newcomer employees, and the unique barriers and needs that newcomer youth face.

7. Lack of online training courses for youth

Service providers and youth participants highlighted the barriers to participating in the employment program due to family, child care, school responsibility, and transportation issues. More online program offerings may serve to overcome these barriers.

8. Maintain consistency of instructors and coordinators

Some service providers describe spending the majority of their time tending to behavioural issues in the classroom environment. Likewise, the program loses the integrity, respect, and engagement of the youth participants under revolving instructors.

Ideally, an instructor is able to build a long-term relationship with youth participants over their tenure with an organization.

9. A holistic approach to programming should extend to school

School is the major context under which newcomer youth development and cultural understanding occur, yet student counsellors are under-utilized (or over-extended) resources for newcomer youth.

10. The most effective in-class lessons are real-world examples and career paths.

Youth report that guest speakers who describe their personal career pathways helped clarify their goals and provided valuable information on the obstacles and opportunities in front of them.



REVIEW:**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMING**

Considering the previous critiques of employment programming, recommendations for improvement include:

Program Design Recommendations:

- Employability programs should prioritize social development through increased social networking events and peer-to-peer opportunities
- Employability programs should offer courses online so youth can take their training anytime and anywhere
- Employability programs should prioritize teaching real-world examples and how the skills learned in programs apply to the Canadian workplace
- Employability programs should emphasize engagement with not only the youth but also the surrounding family
- Employability programs should maintain an interpretation services database and emphasize the hiring of multi-lingual personnel
- Employability programs should endeavor to establish proper expectations with employers regarding the employment needs of their participants

Service Provider Management Recommendations:

- Service providers should prioritize minimizing turnover in instructors and coordinators, especially those highly-visible to youth
- Service providers should organize concurrent programming options for different age ranges and/or genders
- Service providers should prioritize their presence in the school system as marketers of their programs and facilitators of newcomer peer-to-peer connections
- Service providers should develop and nurture relationships with employers to keep track of employment program participants and how well they have integrated into the employer's workplace

Funder Recommendations:

- Funders should provide additional funding to extend program durations beyond 12 weeks
- Funders should provide additional funding to address transportation issues through bus passes and additional service locations

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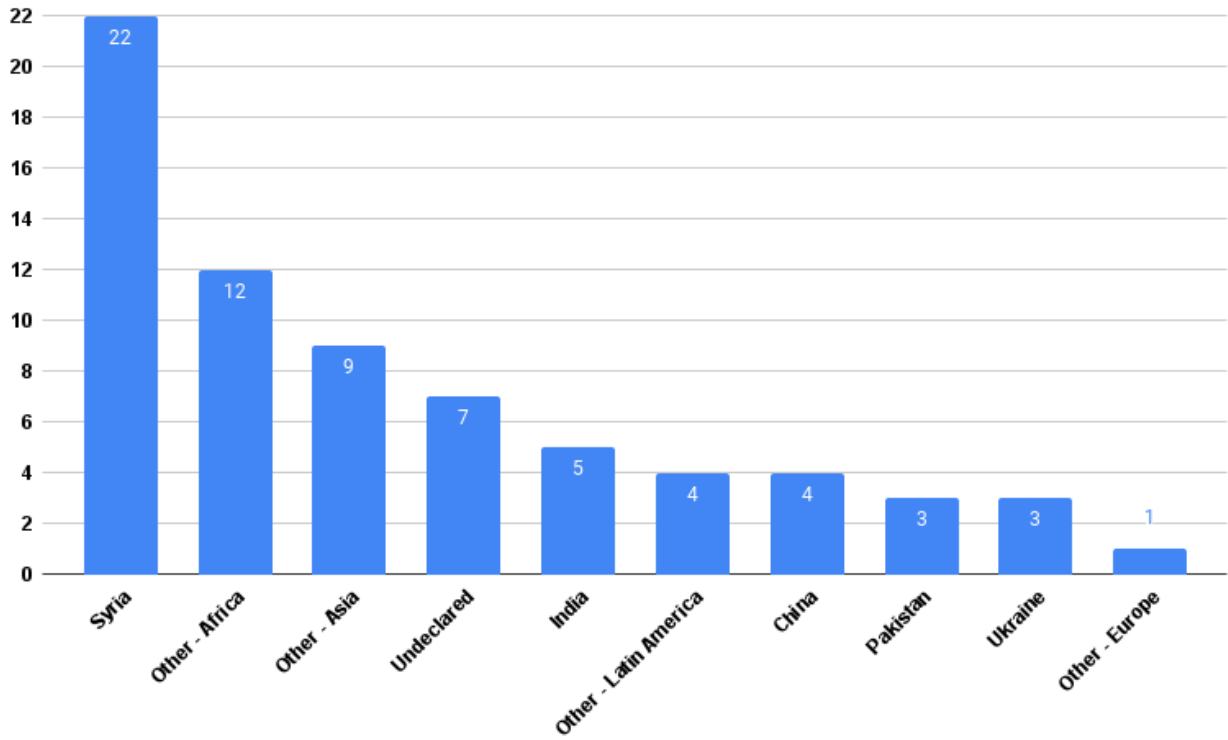
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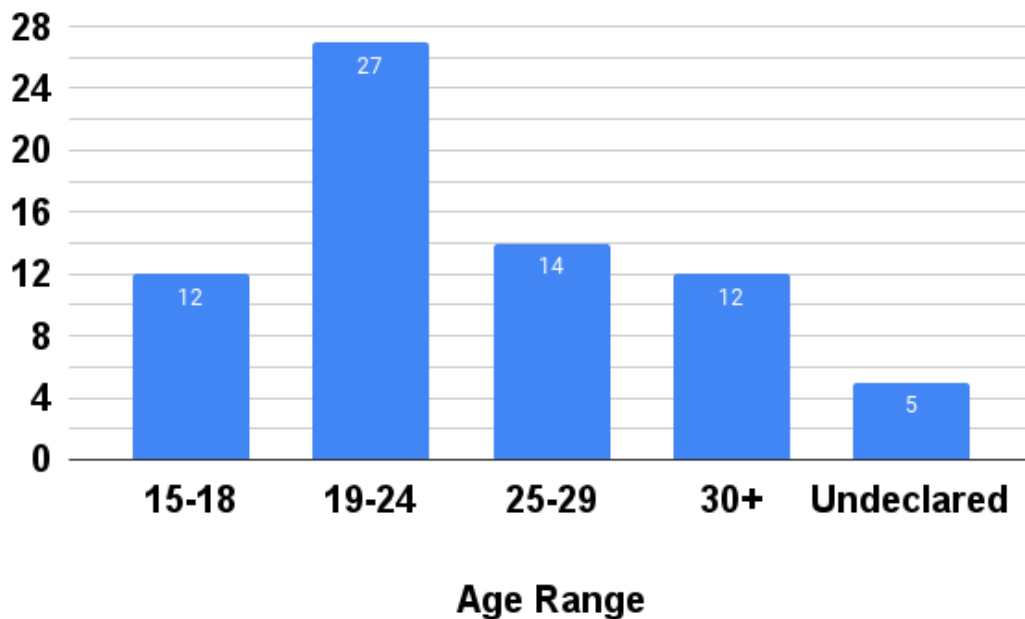
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Appendix

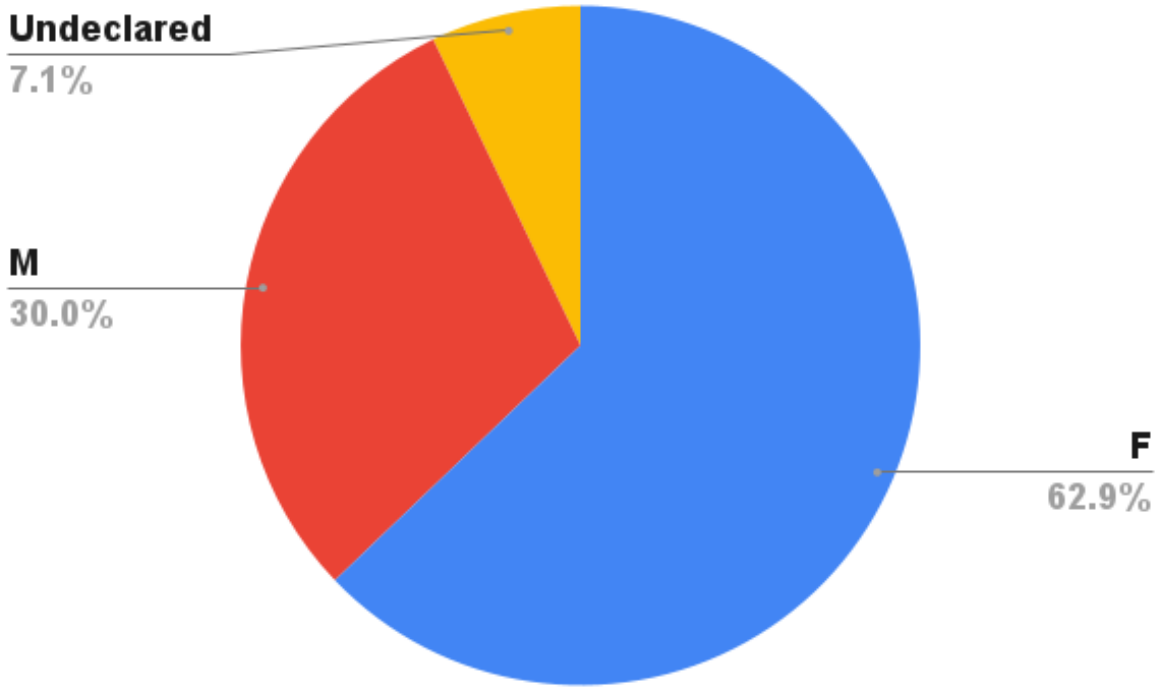
GRAPH 1: COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



GRAPH 2: AGE RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS



GRAPH 3: IDENTIFIED GENDER OF PARTICIPANTS



GRAPH 4: PARTICIPANT TIME SPENT IN CANADA

